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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000435

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TAGS: PGOV KPKO MOPS CG UG

SUBJECT: ITURI: FARDC AND MONUC SEAL OFF BUNIA FROM MILITIAS

REF: A. KINSHASA 411

1B. KINSHASA 359

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) The Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC), with support from MONUC peacekeepers, have sealed off Bunia to prevent the infiltration of militia forces into the city. Following the cessation of Operation Ituri Engraver (reftels), militias have continued sporadic attacks against the FARDC and MONUC positions in Ituri. The Ituri militias have since been expanding their areas of operations to locations just south of Bunia. An internal MONUC planning document reports that militia forces have begun infiltrating the Kendia and Simbiliyabo quarters of Bunia. MONUC reports that sources have witnessed militia heading from Zumbe, Medu and Mandro (all approximately 15km south-southeast of Bunia), seeking to mix in among the civilian population. In response, the FARDC have cordoned off Bunia, while MONUC and Congolese police begin search-and-cordon operations in the area.

12. (C) Ituri District Commissioner Petronille Vaweka confirmed to PolOff March 14 that Bunia had been sealed off by MONUC and FARDC troops. Vaweka said, however, that she did not believe Bunia was being threatened by the "infiltration" of militias. She said the militias have been living and hiding in Bunia for more than 10 years, and receive substantial support from the local population. Vaweka said cordoning off Bunia would have little effect on preventing militia movements.

13. (C) Vaweka added that the biggest problem currently facing the local government is the influx of displaced persons in Bunia as a result of recent fighting. Vaweka said the city of Bunia was being "overrun" by IDPs, many of whom are seeking shelter with family members. Vaweka estimated there are perhaps 5,000 IDPs within Bunia's city limits. According to MONUC-Bunia, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that approximately 12,000 IDPs have registered with the agency, and most have found shelter in public schools, churches, and host families.

14. (C) Internal MONUC documents also contain reports that other militia groups, notably the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC), is recruiting children in Lipri, Nyakunde, Loga, Zumbe, Mandro, Ezekele and Kambutso (all north of Bunia). MONUC sources also report having seen children in former militia training camps in Loga.

15. (C) Militias are continuing their attacks on MONUC and FARDC troops that began with the suspension of Ituri Engraver. Militia forces attacked March 12-13 MONUC and FARDC positions at several locations in Ituri. On the night of

March 12, militias reportedly tried to advance on a post of Moroccan peacekeepers in Bogoro. MONUC reports that the Moroccan sentries detected the movement and opened fire on the militia, who subsequently fled the area. On the morning of March 13, militias fired upon FARDC and MONUC Bangladeshi troops in the Khajana area. After a 10-minute exchange of fire, the militia fled to the southeast. Later that afternoon, militias conducted firefights on FARDC positions south of Khajana and west of Kagaba. Again, militia troops fled when counterattacked.

¶ 6. (C) MONUC also reports that Ituri militias are receiving arms and ammunition from Ugandan sources. According to MONUC-Bunia Head of Office Sharouh Sharif, the Ugandan-backed MRC is supplying weapons to militias in Tcheli. Arms are being brought to the area from Uganda through Semiliki, Boguma and Boga (approximately 50km south of Bunia). In addition, FARDC 9th Military Region Commander Gen. Padiri Bulenda reportedly told MONUC that ex-Union of Patriotic Congolese (UPC) Chief of Staff Bosco Ntaganda recently left North Kivu and moved to the Tcheli area. MONUC has not been able to independently confirm this allegation.

¶ 7. (C) Comment: The suspension of military operations in Ituri has allowed militias to rearm and regroup. The influx of IDPs into Bunia will place more burdens on the local government, which is already unable to provide basic services. Cross-border arms trafficking, if accurate and allowed to continue, will exacerbate the militia threat. In addition, the delay by the FARDC to reinforce its own troops after the March 1 Aveba mutiny again demonstrates the inability of the national army to operate independent of MONUC assistance. Meanwhile, as elections approach and MONUC becomes more engaged in securing and transporting election

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materials, the more difficult it will be for peacekeepers to confront the militia threat and prevent it from spilling over into other provinces. End comment.

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